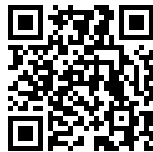

This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

Google™ books

<http://books.google.com>



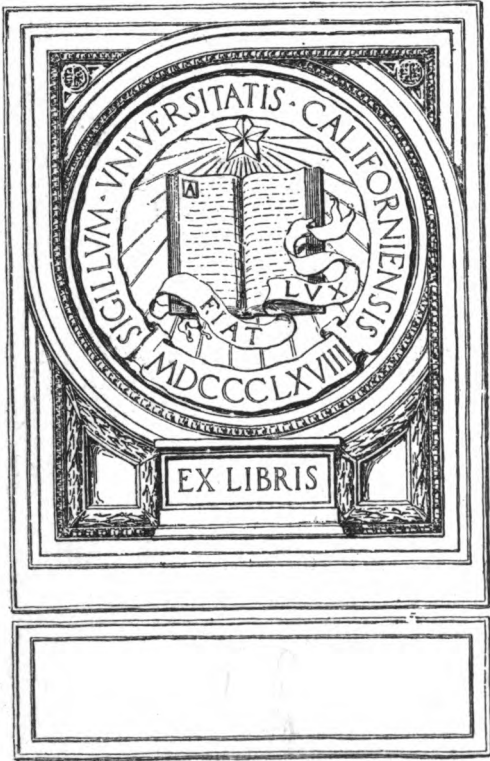


Finding God's comfort

James Russell Miller

... WHEN BY SELF-FORGETFULNESS WE BEGIN TO HELP OTHERS.

GIFT OF
The Argonaut.



FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

•

DR. J. R. MILLER'S BOOKS

A HEART GARDEN	JOY OF SERVICE
BEAUTY OF EVERY DAY	LESSON OF LOVE
BEAUTY OF SELF-CONTROL	MAKING THE MOST OF
BETHLEHEM TO OLIVET	LIFE
BOOK OF COMFORT	MINISTRY OF COMFORT
BUILDING OF CHARACTER	MORNING THOUGHTS
COME YE APART	PERSONAL FRIENDSHIPS OF
DR. MILLER'S YEAR BOOK	JESUS
EVENING THOUGHTS	SILENT TIMES
EVERY DAY OF LIFE	STORY OF A BUSY LIFE
FINDING THE WAY	STRENGTH AND BEAUTY
FOR THE BEST THINGS	THINGS THAT ENDURE
GATE BEAUTIFUL	THINGS TO LIVE FOR
GLIMPSES THROUGH LIFE'S	UPPER CURRENTS
WINDOWS	WHEN THE SONG BEGINS
GLORY OF THE COMMON-	WIDER LIFE
PLACE	YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROB-
GOLDEN GATE OF PRAYER	LEMS
HIDDEN LIFE	

BOOKLETS

BEAUTY OF KINDNESS	LEARNING TO LOVE
BLESSING OF CHEERFUL-	LOVING MY NEIGHBOR
NESS	MARRIAGE ALTAR
BY THE STILL WATERS	MARY OF BETHANY
CHRISTMAS MAKING	MASTER'S FRIENDSHIPS
CURE FOR CARE	SECRET OF GLADNESS
FACE OF THE MASTER	SECRET OF LOVE
GENTLE HEART	SECRETS OF HAPPY HOME
GIRLS: FAULTS AND IDEALS	LIFE
GLIMPSES OF THE HEAV-	SUMMER GATHERING
ENLY LIFE	TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW
GO FORWARD	TURNING NORTHWARD
HOW? WHEN? WHERE?	UNTO THE HILLS
IN PERFECT PEACE	YOUNG MEN: FAULTS AND
INNER LIFE	IDEALS
JOY OF THE LORD	

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

TO VISIT
ABSORLIAO

• • CONFESSION • AND • RESTORATION • •



NOW MINE EYE SEETH THEE : WHEREFORE I ABHOR
MYSELF , AND REPENT IN DUST AND ASHES .

FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

BY

J. R. MILLER

AUTHOR OF "THE SECRET OF LOVE," "THE JOY OF THE LORD,"
"UPPER CURRENTS," ETC.

EDITED BY JOHN T. FARIS

NEW YORK
THOMAS Y. CROWELL COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

BV4905-
MS-

THE
NEW
AMERICAN

COPYRIGHT, 1913,
BY THOMAS Y. CROWELL COMPANY.

CONTENTS

I. AFFLICTIONS	<i>Page</i>	1
II. AFFLICTIONS SANCTIFIED		13
III. AN APPEAL TO GOD		24
IV. CONFESSION AND RESTORATION		37

FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

I

AFFLICTIONS

THERE is an ancient book called Job which takes its name from the man whose story it tells. He lived in the land of Uz. He was a man of upright life and godly character. He had a large family and was very prosperous. The home life of his family was particularly happy. His children feasted together daily and their father took pains with their religious life.

The disinterestedness of Job's piety was questioned in the heavenly councils by Satan. God asked him, "Hast thou considered my servant Job? For there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright

2 FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

man, one that feareth God, and turneth away from evil." Satan answered suspiciously: "Doth Job fear God for naught? Hast not thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land."

Thereupon Satan received permission to try Job, who was stripped of all his possessions and bereft of his children. When tidings of his sore losses were brought to him he exhibited deep grief, but he made no complaint; he only said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away."

Again there came a day when God talked with Satan. God asked Satan where he had been. Satan replied that he had come "from going to and fro in the earth." This

•• CONFESSION •• AND •• RESTORATION ••

83



WE BEGIN TO FIND JOY ONLY WHEN IN SELF-FORGETFULNESS WE BEGIN TO HELP OTHERS.

THE
WINDY
CITY

was Satan's account of his occupation. He had been very busy, running here and there among men. He did not say what he had been doing in this hurried going from place to place. We know the kind of employment which fills his hours. We know he is never the friend of men and never the friend of good. He never goes about to bless people. Peter confirms Satan's own statement that he is ever going about, but he adds a word, lifting the veil and showing how the adversary is engaged, what he does. He goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. So we learn that he is not so harmless a visitor as he would have us think he is. He is very busy, truly, but he is busy finding ways to harm God's children. We may take several lessons. Satan's example of ceaseless activity in doing harm should stimulate us to all

4 FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

manner of activities in doing good. It is a shame if the agencies of sin and evil are more diligent and earnest than the agencies of good and blessing. We should learn also not to be deceived by Satan's professed interest in our lives. Though he transforms himself into the appearance of an angel of light, we know that under his shining robes he hides the lion's heart and the lion's ravenous cruelty.

As before, God asked Satan if he had considered his servant Job, that "there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man." God knows when a man's life is good. His judgment never errs. We may be deceived in others. We may think they are upright and worthy, when in reality their lives are hollow. Every now and then we hear or know of a man long supposed to be honest and true, respected and trusted by his

fellows, who is suddenly unmasked and seen to be only a mockery of the virtues and excellences of which he seemed so long the very embodiment. But when God passes on a man an encomium like this on Job, it is a true judgment, for he sees the heart and knows what is in man. We need not care for any one's good opinion if we have not God's. We should not be indifferent to the approval of men, but it matters little if we have this if we know that God does not approve us. And if men condemn us it need not break our peace if we know that God approves and is pleased with us.

God had more to say about Job: "He still holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause." It is a noble thing to see, when a man stands steadfast and faithful to God in the midst of trials and

6 FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

adversities. Such a man is like a mighty rock under the beatings of the angry waves of the sea. Thus Job stood. Trial after trial came. His property was swept away by marauders and by fire and his children were crushed by falling walls, until in a little while he was stripped of all he had and left a childless man. His heart was broken with sorrow, but his faith failed not. The Lord kept his eye upon his servant and was pleased to see how trustingly he endured his losses and sorrows. Do we meet trials in the same way, holding fast our integrity, although the hand of God rests heavily upon us? The affliction of Job, as described here from the divine side, suggests to us what may oftentimes be the cause of trouble in the lives of God's children. Job suffered to prove to a scoffing adversary the genuineness of his religion. Job did not know

THE LIFE OF
G. W. F. HEGEL

TO VISIT
ANBOTLAD

.. AFFLICTIONS .. SANCTIFIED ..



THEY PASSED THROUGH THE FIRE
ONE MAY SUFFER A GREAT DEAL, AND YET HIS INNER,
SPIRITUAL LIFE MAY NOT RECEIVE ANY HURT .

why these sore losses came upon him. We do not know when we are in trouble why God sends or permits the affliction. But we should always bear ourselves so as to honor God and prove the reality and sincerity of our faith.

Satan was unwilling to agree that Job was such a man as God thought him. He suggested another test: "Put forth thy hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce thee to thy face." That is probably Satan's opinion of all religion. At least there are a good many people in the world who claim to believe that all religion is really selfish, based on mere self-interest and dependent on outward favor. "Every man has his price," they say. People serve God, they aver, only because he is kind to them and so long as he continues to give them favor and goodness. We need to guard our-

8 FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

selves most carefully at this point. Our Lord has told us of those who begin well in their following him, but when persecution arises because of the word, they stumble. There were disciples of his who went back and walked no more with him, because of the severity of his teaching and of the hard requirements of discipleship. No doubt there are many professing Christians who do renounce Christ when he touches their bone and flesh. It is needful that we who begin to follow Christ, look well to our own lives that, come what may of suffering, cost or trial, we shall be faithful and steadfast.

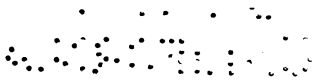
God had his answer ready: "Behold, he is in thy hand; only spare his life." It is comforting to us to know that even Satan with all his power cannot stride where he will in God's preserves. He cannot break in upon a child of God whenever he

pleases, and injure God's little one in any way his fiendish cruelty may choose. Satan could not touch Job till God gave him leave, and then he could go no farther than God permitted. Of Satan's power Jesus said to Peter that dark night: "Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you [margin, obtained you by asking], that he might sift you as wheat." We are not given the full details of Peter's case, but no doubt it was precisely as in Job's here; Satan did not believe there was any reality in Simon's attachment to Christ, and asked leave to prove it. Christ permitted Simon to fall into the adversary's hands. It seems for a time a terribly hazardous thing, but it proved only a sifting. Much of Peter's professed earnestness was sifted out, but a true spiritual reality remained. We tremble when we think of Satan's terrible power, and dread lest he destroy us. But one is

stronger—the “strong Son of God, immortal Love.” If we are his and keep near to him he will shelter us, not allowing Satan to touch us, only when the testing and trial will do us good, and not suffering us to be tempted above that we are able to endure.

When he had received permission from God, Satan so sorely afflicted Job that his wife urged him to renounce God, expressing surprise that he still held forth his integrity. But Job answered, “What, shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” Too often weak faith is moved from its steadfastness by trials. People say, “God cannot love me, or he would not send this affliction upon me.” Job’s answer, however, shows noble faith. We take good, earthly good, from God’s hands. We believe that he loves us so long as he showers upon us

Digitized by Google



• • AFFLICTIONS • •



GOD KNOWS WHEN A MAN'S LIFE IS GOOD . . .
AND IF MEN CONDEMN US IT NEED NOT
BREAK OUR PEACE .

favours and gives us pleasant things, human joys. Very well; when he changes the form of his providences and gives us troubles; when he withdraws the favours, should we conclude that he no longer loves us? We are permitted to see within the heart of God, in this case of the change in his treatment of Job, and we see that God never loved him more than when he allowed him to suffer so sorely. It is always the same. At the close of the first trial Job said, "Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away." The same Lord that gave took away; yes, and the same love. God knows best what we need any day and what will most advance the kingdom of Christ, and we ought to trust him so implicitly, so unquestioningly, that whether he gives a new favour or takes one away; whether he grants us our request or withholds it; whether he bestows upon us earthly good

or causes us to suffer loss and adversity, we shall still believe and say, "God loves me and he is blessing me."

This record of Job's misfortune goes on to say: "In all this did not Job sin with his lips." If Job had let himself murmur against God in his pain, he would have sinned with his lips. If he had lost faith and had spoken impatiently, querulously, rebelliously, he would have sinned with his lips. We need to think seriously of this. We call lying sinning with one's lips. We call profane swearing, words of bitter anger, sins of speech. We sometimes forget that complaining of God's ways with us, repining at God's providences, are also sins. Sweet, quiet, trustful, joyous submission to the will of God is the kind of behavior God is pleased with in his children in time of trouble.

II

AFFLICTIONS SANCTIFIED

JOB'S three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, heard of his sore misfortunes and came to condole with him. They were struck dumb at the sight of his calamity and for several days and nights they sat with him on the ground, none of them speaking a word. At length Job, moved by their presence and sympathy, broke out with a passionate cry for death.

Then began a long debate between Job and his friends on the question of suffering. Eliphaz expressed wonder that Job, being righteous, should be so crushed by his trouble, and that he should so murmur against heaven. One of the happiest statements made by him was, "Behold, happy is the

14 FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

man whom God correcteth." He is not happy at the time, at least, in the world's way. No affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. No one enjoys having troubles, sufferings, trials, sorrows. Therefore this statement made by Eliphaz appears very strange to some people. They cannot understand it. It is contrary to all their thoughts of happiness. Of course the word happy is not used here in the world's sense. Happiness is the pleasure that comes from the things that happen. It depends on personal comfort, on prosperous circumstances, on kindly and congenial conditions. When these are taken away the happiness is destroyed. But the word here means blessed, and the statement is that blessing comes to him who receives God's correction. To correct is to set right that which has been wrong. Surely if a man is going in the wrong way, and

God turns his feet back and sets him in the right way, a blessing has come to the man. Afflictions are God's corrections. They come always with a purpose of love in them. God never afflicts one of his children without meaning his child's good in some way. So blessing is always intended. It is usually afterward that people begin to see and to understand the good that God sent them in their trial. "What I do thou knowest not now," said Jesus, "but thou shalt understand hereafter." "All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness." So when we have troubles we may know that God wants to do us good in some way through them.

Since this is so, Job was exhorted by Eliphaz, "Therefore despise not thou the

chastening of the Almighty." He chastens us to save us—to do us good. He chastens us because he loves us. He is not a true parent who sees his children doing wrong, and yet fails to correct them for fear he may hurt their feelings. He ought to think of their higher good, and chasten them now to save them forever. This is the way our heavenly Father does. He never loves us better than when he is correcting us. Therefore we ought not to despise this chastening. We ought not to murmur or complain when God does not give us our own way, but checks us, lays his hand upon us, and sends trouble upon us. We ought to have such faith in God that we shall submit quietly, confidently, and sweetly to his will, even when it brings a cross into our life. A great many people need to pause at this line and learn it. They do not treat God's

chastening with reverence. Sometimes they are crushed by it, and refuse to look up into God's face with submission and love. Sometimes they grow bitter against God and say hard things of him. A letter lies before me while I write, in which one who has met sore experiences, whose lot in life is indeed unhappy, says almost angry things of the God who could permit his child to suffer so. We ought not to despise—we ought to reverence God's chastening as sacred with the sacredness of the divine love. We ought to listen to the voice that speaks to us in our grief or pain.

The way in which God brings blessing through chastening is emphasized: "For he maketh sore, and bindeth up." Some one says that God never smites with both hands at once. When one hand is laid upon us in affliction, the other hand is reached out to help, to uphold, to heal.

Sometimes there is a trouble in a man's body which requires the surgeon's knife. There must be amputation, or cutting away, or cutting into. In such a case the skillful surgeon does not hesitate. He thinks far more of his patient's health for the future than of his comfort at present. So he uses his knife that he may cure disease or save life. He wounds to heal. He makes sore that he may bind up. It is so in all affliction which God sends. He chastens that he may deliver the life from the power of temptation. He hurts the body that he may save the soul. He takes away earthly property that he may give true, heavenly riches.

The assurance continues, "He will deliver thee in six troubles." We have no promise that he will deliver us from troubles, but we have only assurances that in our trouble he will save us from being

BOOK OF
JOB

• • AFFLICTIONS • • •



IT IS A NOBLE THING TO SEE, WHEN A MAN STANDS STEADFAST
AND FAITHFUL TO GOD, IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS AND
ADVERSITIES THUS JOB STOOD

Digitized by Google

harm. There may be trial after trial, but no evil shall really touch us. We have an illustration in the story of the three young Hebrews who were cast into the burning furnace in Babylon. They passed through the fire, but the flames did not kindle upon them. This deliverance was supernatural, but it was an illustration of that which God always does for the souls of those who trust him and do his will, when they are led through trouble. One may be very sick for a long time and may suffer a great deal, and yet his inner, spiritual life may not receive any hurt. One may lose money or property, and yet his true treasure remain untouched. In all earthly troubles we have to submit to God and to do his will, in love and trust, and he will guard our lives from any real harm.

The harm from which God guards his

people is noted: "Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue." It seems strange to have the tongue called a scourge. A scourge is a whip with which one smites, inflicting gashes. When we think of it, the tongue is a whip. We sometimes hear the ugly expression "tongue-lashing," used when one has chastised another with sharp or severe words. There are many kinds of words that are like scourges. Some people are forever speaking false words of others—calumnies—trying to injure their reputation. There is a great deal of scandal and gossip in the common talk of many. Some speak unkind words—sharp, cutting, wounding words. The tongue is an instrument of cruelty and harm in many instances. But this word says that God will hide his own children from the scourge of the tongue. How does he do this? Not always as he hid Daniel when in the den

of lions, by shutting the savage creatures' mouths. Oftener he does it by means of the shelter of love, which covers them and keeps them from being hurt by the bitter words. Joseph was lied against and suffered for a time, being cast into prison; but the false words did not really do him any harm in the end. False tongues spoke their calumnies against Jesus, but not one of them hurt him, for God hid him meanwhile in the refuge of his own love. So it will be always with those who put their trust in God and go quietly on in the way of duty, while others defame them or revile them. God will preserve them from all the evil consequences of men's slanderous or angry words. Only we must take care never to return evil for evil, bitter word for bitter word. When we are reviled, we must not revile again; when we are defamed, we must not threaten, but

must commit ourselves to him who judges righteously.

“Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of grain cometh in in its season.” This is a beautiful picture of a godly old age. We often see laid on the coffin or held in the dead hand of an old person a little sheaf of ripe wheat. It suggests that the life is complete; that it has filled out its measure of years; and that its harvest is ready. That is the thought in these words. Eliphaz and Job would enjoy great blessing and prosperity; would live to a good old age; and would be like a sheaf of ripe wheat at the last. Of course not all good people live to be old. Many of the best die in childhood, in youth, in early years, in the midst of life's prime. But at whatever time a Christian dies, his life is in one sense like a shock of corn, coming in in its season. As God

Digitized by Google

••AN••APPEAL••TO••GOD••



THE FIRST THING ALWAYS, IN ANY TIME OF TROUBLE, IS TO FIND GOD AND HIDE AWAY IN HIS BOSOM, AS A CHILD RUNS TO THE MOTHER IN ALARM.

Digitized by Google

looks upon the death of his own, none die prematurely. He gathers no unripe fruits into his garner. Whether long or short, therefore, the life that is devoted to God and is lived obediently, lovingly, and sweetly, comes home at the end, in the beauty of blessed ripeness, into the heavenly Father's bosom.

III

AN APPEAL TO GOD

EACH of Job's friends, in turn, argued his case, and to each of these Job replied. Three times the discourse went around in this way, excepting that in the last round Zophar was silent—a confession of defeat. The friends urged Job to confess and repent, promising that then God would restore him to favor. They believed that it was for sin of his that the hand of God rested so heavily upon him. Job was bewildered, but indignantly repelled the charge that he was being punished for sin.

But in all the greatness of Job's loss and sorrow, and in all the intensity of his own personal affliction, he did not breathe

a murmur against God. Once, indeed, he did say, "Even to-day is my complaint rebellious." But he meant that his sufferings were so great that he could scarcely, if at all, repress his complaint. He does not mean that he was rebellious against God, for he was not; but that with his faith in God and his submission to the divine will, he could hardly keep his grief and pain from breaking out in cries and groanings.

Though crushed by the terrible blows which had fallen upon him, his heart gave way to no bitter or unbelieving words. There is here a beautiful lesson for us. We shall all sometime have our troubles—not likely such sore troubles as Job had, yet troubles which it will sorely try our souls to endure. If we are God's children we should bear even the sorest trials and the greatest sufferings without complaining against God. It may not always be pos-

26 FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

sible to repress the outcries of anguish, though as far as possible we should do this; but even if our complaint is rebellious, too full of pain to be repressed, we should not have in our heart any rebellious feeling toward God. An English writer tells of two birds and how they acted when caught and put into a cage. One, a starling, flew violently against the wire walls of its prison, in unavailing efforts to escape, only battering and bruising its own breast and wings. The other bird, a canary, perched itself on the bar and began to pour forth from its little throat bursts of sweet song. We know which bird was the wiser. Some people are like the starling; when they are in any trouble they chafe and fret and complain and give way to wretchedness. The result is, they only hurt themselves, make themselves more miserable and do not in any sense lessen their trouble. It is

wiser always, as well as more pleasing to God, for us to bear our trials patiently, singing songs of faith and love, rather than crying out in pain and discontent.

Patient Job wanted to get near to God in his great trouble; he cried, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" He felt sure that that would be the best and safest place for him to be. We ought not to lose this lesson. When trouble is upon us the true thing for us to do is to flee to God. Some people, in their affliction and sorrow, flee away from God. They pray less rather than more. They become afraid of God, at times almost distrustful of him. They even think God cannot be their friend or he would not cause them such suffering. Many people in time of sorrow get away from God. Thus they lose their joy and peace, missing the comfort which they would get if only they kept

near to him. The right way to do is to try to find the way to God's very presence. This is the only safe refuge when the storms of trouble break. Even the young ought to learn what to do in the time of sorrow—for sorrow comes to all. Some day they will have to meet it, and if they know where to go and how to bear themselves, they will not be overwhelmed even by the most sudden calamity breaking upon them. The first thing always, in any time of trouble, is to find God and hide away in his bosom, as a child runs to the mother in alarm, or as the little bird flies to its nest. To find God is to be safe.

The reason Job wanted to get face to face with God was stated by him: "I would set my cause in order before him." He had confidence that God was his friend and that if he could stand before him and tell him all about his life, it would be well.

We may have the same confidence if we are God's children. This does not mean that we have no sins and that we can appear in God's presence and explain our acts and show him that we have done nothing wrong. We are sinners and can come before him only with penitence and confession. But when we come thus and cast ourselves on his love and mercy, we may order our cause before him without fear, not pleading innocence, but pleading the grace of Christ. We know that God is pitiful toward our infirmities.

“ Like as a father pitieth his children,
So Jehovah pitieth them that fear him.
For he knoweth our frame;
He remembereth that we are dust.”

A still sweeter truth than that which is uttered here is that we have One who can order our cause before God and who will always seek acceptance for us. If

30 FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

any one sin, said the beloved disciple, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. We may go to God in his name, in the time of trouble sure that in his hands all our interests will be safe, for he ever liveth to make intercession.

Job was sure that if he could only get to God he would find him a Friend. "He would give heed unto me," was his expression of faith. He had been learning more and more of God's real nature, and had at least some gleams of the true character of the mighty God. Especially does he seem to have gotten some glimpses of the divine Redeemer who was his friend. Thus a little earlier he said:

"I know that my Redeemer liveth,
And at last he will stand up upon the earth:
And after my skin, even this body, is destroyed,
Then without my flesh shall I see God;
Whom I, even I, shall see, on my side,
And mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger."

Just how much Job really did know of the character of God we cannot tell. He certainly believed now that if he could come before God he would meet a friend. We live in full gospel light and we know that God is our truest and best friend; that he is our Father; that we need never fear to make an appeal to him. He is not against us. His almighty power is not used to oppose us, to break us and crush us. He gives heed unto our cry. He loves us. All his omnipotence is on our side. No mother's heart was ever so full of love for her child as is the heart of God for us, his children.

Though clouds darkened his sky, Job's faith was not clouded. He said: "He hideth himself . . . that I cannot see him. But he knoweth the way that I take." God is invisible, and we cannot see him. We see that he is working here and there, and

we turn quickly to find him, but our eyes get no glimpse of him. We cannot lay our hand upon him. We cannot see his face. Yet we know that while he is not visible to our sight he sees us always and knows our way—where we are, what we are doing, what our circumstances and experiences are. There is wonderful comfort in this for us, especially when we are in the midst of dangers and trials. "He knoweth." There is a beautiful illustration of this in the Gospels. One night Jesus sent his disciples out upon the sea, in the boat, to go to the other side, but he did not go with them. In the night a great storm arose, and the disciples were alone. They were in great distress. We can imagine their looking to the right and to the left, forward and back, but they could not find their Master. Meanwhile, however, though unseen by them, he was

looking down upon them in tender love from the mountain-top. He knew the way that they took in the darkness on the sea. His eye was upon them in all their danger; and we know well that they could not have perished in the storm, for he was caring for them. In our experience it may often be that we cannot find God; that we cannot see him; that he shall elude our search, and not answer to our cry, and not come when we call for him. Yet it is a precious comfort that in all such cases he knows the way that we take, where we are, and what we are suffering. We are never out of his sight. We are never forgotten by his love. Always "he knoweth," and that is enough. "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." "The Lord knoweth them that are his."

"The eyes of Jehovah are toward the righteous,
And his ears are open unto their cry."

34 FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

Job's faith enables him to say, "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Another translation of this line is: "He is trying me; I shall come forth as gold." Job had caught the true meaning of his suffering. It was trial—testing—as gold is tried and tested. He felt sure, too, that the trials, sore as they were, would not do him any real harm. We have all the light of divine revelation on this mystery of pain and suffering, and we know that what Job had here learned as in a glimmering is the blessed truth about trial. God chastens always to save. He sends trouble to prove us and to establish us, to make us strong, to cleanse us from sin, and to bring out in us the divine beauty. We are all the while being tested and proved. Trials show us what is in us. Some one says that afflictions are to the soul as a driving rain to a house. The water comes

through the roof. The owner did not know in the long dry season that there were holes and crannies in the roof. The storm revealed them. We do not suspect our weak points until temptation comes; then we find them out. So in many persons there are noble qualities of character which do not appear in the common experiences of life, but which come out in emergencies. On a sinking ship there was only one life-belt left, and it was the captain's. There was a poor lad on board—a stowaway. The captain took his own belt and gave it to the boy, himself perishing in the waters. No one would have suspected this grandeur of soul in the captain an hour before. Like revealings of character are made continually in life—on the playground, in homes, in times of danger, in the sick-room. People we supposed thought only of themselves are found to

36 FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

have hearts of unselfish love. Those we thought weak or timid are proved strong and heroic. We are on trial all the time, and the experiences of life show what is in us. Well is it for us if we always come forth as gold.

IV

CONFESSION AND RESTORATION

AFTER Job's three friends had talked with him for a time, a new speaker appeared. This was Elihu. His anger was kindled both against Job and his three friends, and his speech was intended to justify God. He was a young man, but his words were wise and wonderfully full of instruction on the great problem of suffering.

Finally God answers Job out of the storm. Job is awed and humbled by the words of God, by the sense of his majesty and holiness, and he speaks penitently and softly. God spoke of his might, and Job said: "I know that . . . no purpose of thine can be restrained." Men's power is

limited. We cannot do what we would. Many of our purposes are restrained. We want to do good and beautiful things, and we try, but our achievements fall far below our thought. Our clumsy hands cannot fashion the loveliness our hearts dreamed. Our faltering weakness cannot do the brave things our souls aspire to do. No artist ever paints on his canvas all the beauty of his ideal. No great singer ever expresses all the music that burns within him as he sings. No eloquent orator ever utters all that he feels, as he pleads for truth or for justice. So in all our life we do only a little of what we strive to do. We set out in the morning with purposes of usefulness, of true living, of gentle-heartedness, of patience, of victoriousness; but in the evenings we find only little fragments of these good intentions wrought out. Much of our living is but faded blossoms

CONFESSION AND RESTORATION 39

which never grow into fruit. But it is not so with God. No purpose of his can be restrained. His thoughts all take form. He speaks, and it is done. His intentions are all carried out. No power can withstand him or balk his will. He doeth all his good pleasure. There is no comfort in this truth for us. It was in this thought that Job found peace after his long, sore trial. All things were in God's hands, and nothing could hinder his designs of love. There is comfort here for us. Our God is infinitely strong. He can do anything he wills to do. No human power can balk any purpose of his. In all earthly confusions, strifes, troubles, sorrows, his hand moves, bringing good out of evil, gain out of loss, for those who trust in him. We need never be afraid to leave our life absolutely in God's keeping, for he is our Father and nothing can thwart his love.

The thought of God's majesty leads Job to confession: "Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not." That is the trouble with most of us. We talk about things of which we know nothing. We chatter about God and God's ways as if he were a next-door neighbor, just like ourselves, whose thoughts and plans and feelings and motives we understand from our own. We seem to forget that he is infinitely greater than we are, that his ways are wonderful, past finding out. Zophar, in one of his speeches to Job, puts it thus: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than Sheol; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."

Job himself, speaking of God's works in

nature and in providence, adds, "Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways: and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?"

We ought to learn the lesson. God is not a man, not one of ourselves. If we could understand him he would not be God. His greatness puts him beyond our comprehension. We cannot hope to know the reasons for his acts. Some of his ways with us are strange ways. We are perplexed. We say, "God cannot love me or he would not do these things, send these sorrows." As if we could know why he does these strange things! We ought to learn to trust God even in the deepest mysteries, not expecting to know, but sure of his love and goodness even when it is darkest and when his face is veiled in most impenetrable mists. We ought to be silent

unto God even when we cannot understand. That is the truest faith.

Job was not satisfied with anything short of most humble confession: "Now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." That is always the way. Seeing God humbles us. When we are far from God we see only dim revealings of him, and have no true conception of his glory and holiness. Most of the stars we see in the heavens are said to be vast suns, like our own, perhaps larger and brighter. But to our eyes they appear as only little points of light, because of their immense distance from us. Yet if we could fly away through space and draw near to them, they would appear more and more brilliant, until, at length, their radiance would dazzle and blind us. So it is that men are not impressed with the greatness and the majesty of God while

they are far from him. But as they come near to him he is revealed to them in glory and blessedness, and the revelation shows them their own littleness, their own sinfulness. The more we know of God the less do we think of ourselves. When Isaiah saw the vision of God in the temple, he cried, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts." Once when Jesus had wrought a miracle—filling the nets of the disciple-fishermen—Peter fell down on his knees and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." The work of power had given Peter a glimpse of the glory—the deity—of Christ, and the revealing had shown the disciple such a sight of his own unworthiness that could not endure the holy presence. The experience is most wholesome. It is only as we learn our own

44 FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

true condition that we grow in spiritual life. Seeing Christ transforms us into his own likeness, by showing us our sins and leading us to depart from them and by showing us his blessed beauty and drawing us toward it.

God was pleased with Job's sincerity and humility, but he was displeased with Job's friends, and he said to them, "My wrath is kindled against thee, . . . for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right." We must be careful never to misrepresent God. We must be careful not to profess to be his interpreters, telling others what God means, why he does this or that, lest we speak of him the thing that is not right. The friends of Job made that mistake. They thought they understood God's meaning and purposes in Job's trials, and they pressed the thoughts upon the suffering man, adding to his pain and grief. But

they had spoken of that of which they knew nothing and had done only harm. We had better not try to explain God's meanings in his darker providences. We may interpret them wrongly, thus misrepresenting and dishonoring God and hurting feeble, sensitive souls. We would better let God be his own interpreter.

God did not turn from the friends without a message of comfort: "My servant Job shall pray for you; for him will I accept." It is a great thing to have for a friend one who has God's ear. We think ourselves happy, when we desire a favor of one in high place, if we have a friend who can speak for us with influence. Still greater privilege is it when we have an intercessor who can present our names to heaven's King, and whose voice has power with him. There are human friends who can and do serve us in this way. They

live near to the heart of Christ and can speak to God sure of being heard. "The supplication of a righteous man availeth much." When the telegraph brought me the word that my mother was dead, my first flash of thought was a sense of the loss of her prayers for me. But the best intercessor we can have is he who died for us and yet rose again, and who ever liveth, to make intercession for us. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Him the Father heareth always. Blessed are they for whom Jesus prays.

Job did as God suggested. He prayed for his friends, and his prayer for others brought blessing to himself: "Jehovah turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends." This is an important statement. There seems to have been a barrier in the way of the blessing

on Job which was not removed until he began to pray for his friends. Probably he had a feeling of unkindness in his heart toward them, because of what they had said to him about his trials and the reasons for them. We are not surprised that Job felt in this way toward his friends, for they were not wise and gentle comforters, and they doubtless gave him more pain than they soothed. A good many people who try to be comforters only lay thorns under aching heads instead of a soft pillow of down. No art needs a more delicate touch. The hands of most of us are too rough and clumsy to be laid on throbbing human hearts in efforts to soothe their pain. No wonder Job felt that his friends were miserable comforters, and that he was not at first in a mood to pray for them. But until he could pray for them, blessing could not come to him. Unloving

48 FINDING GOD'S COMFORT

hearts cannot receive the divine love. The lesson is for us. Others may have injured us or grieved us in some way, and we may not be ready to forgive them. But while we feel so we are shutting divine blessing away from ourselves. Job's praying at length for his friends showed that his heart was now softened toward them, that its bitterness was gone, that he had forgiven their cruel words and taken them back into his heart. Then blessing came to him. His captivity was turned. When we can pray for one who has wronged us, or misjudged us, or said unkind things of us, we are in a condition to receive blessing from God. Job was also ready now to come out of his sorrow to try to help others. This, too, is a good thing. We do not find comfort by staying in the darkness of our own grief, by thinking only of it; we must forget ourselves and begin to serve others and

CONFESSION AND RESTORATION 49

seek their good before we can find the light of God's comfort. Selfishness in sorrow is—selfishness, and selfishness in any form misses God's blessing. We begin to find joy only when in self-forgetfulness we begin to help others.

UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

TO THE
AMERICAN

**THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW**

**AN INITIAL FINE OF 25 CENTS
WILL BE ASSESSED FOR FAILURE TO RETURN
THIS BOOK ON THE DATE DUE. THE PENALTY
WILL INCREASE TO 50 CENTS ON THE FOURTH
DAY AND TO \$1.00 ON THE SEVENTH DAY
OVERDUE.**

FEB 22 1933

DEC 8 1974

REC'D CIRC DEPT NOV 13 '74

LD 21-50m-1,'3

304141

BV4905
M5

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

